All knowledge claims should be open to rational criticism. On what grounds and to what extent would you agree with this assertion?

Thesis: If truth is the greater purpose of knowledge claims, then all knowledge claims should be open to rational criticism.

Definition of terms-

* Knowledge claims-
* Rational-
* Criticism-
* Rational criticisms-

Truth-

* Seeking truth
* What is truth?
* How is it sought?
* Do criticisms bring about truth?

Grounds for agreement-

* Does the question align with thinking, reading, philosophy that I agree with?
  + Carl Sagan (Why?)
    - Logical fallacies
    - Separation of the actual from the false.

Individualize argument-

* Bring Sagan’s argument down to an individual/personal level.

Clarify extent-

* Level, magnitude, scope
* Complete submission to will of the criticism
* Always seek to give over fully

All knowledge claims should be open to rational criticism.

Rational criticism should be used to separate the truth from the falsehood.

Truth is the purpose of all knowledge claims.

All of human kind seeks truth. It is built within us to seek “the answer” to “the question”. For many, the question is different, for some it is the same, for all, the journey there is most important. Imagine there is a young boy sitting on a low red bench in the middle of a park that is covered in green grass. He is alone with just the wind for company. The boy asks himself a question, “Is there meaning to life?”. He thinks long and hard trying to find an answer. A picture of his sister fills his mind; she is beautiful, euphoric and content with life. He imagines freshly baked bread, the smell filling his nostrils with overwhelming vividness. The sound of Beethoven’s Canon in D Major drifts slowly on the wind as if only for his ears. Could these things be the meaning of life? The epitome of beauty carved and created out of others? Yes, he thinks, but also no. I do not know the answer. But he has found truth in knowing that he does not know. A sight, a sound or a smell could all be truth and all not be truth at the same time.

This is the realization, or something like it, that is sought after. How we come by this realization is through the use of rational criticisms. If truth is the greater purpose of all knowledge claims, then all knowledge claims should be open to rational criticisms. Knowledge claims of this nature, concerning truth, are defined as logical assertions concerning any subject. Rational criticism is the criticism of an assumption, argument, statement or claim based on logic and reason, used in the hope of either betterment for the specified claim or complete disregard of it. An obvious example of where knowledge claims should be open to rational criticism is when statements arise from assumption. If I were to say “water conducts electricity” my knowledge claim here is based upon my assumption that samples of water taken from a local stream allow a light bulb to light up when connected to a circuit. What I am stating does have observational implications but that is as far reaching as my results can extend, just that one sample conducts electricity. Here is where rational criticism finds a role. Through my rational criticism of the stream water I can say that it contains many other elements including sodium. Now as a counter example I would distill water by boiling it, removing any other alien elements such as sodium. When I connect this to a circuit I would observe that the bulb does not light up. My conclusion, the initial knowledge claim is incorrect because I have rationally proven that distilled “water” does not conduct electricity.

The previous example was a fairly simple and elementary one. In order for us to address more complicated knowledge claims such as those made by Isaac Newton in the 16th and 17th century, we are equipped with an arsenal of tools. Many of these tools were developed and put forward by Carl Sagan. Sagan believed that one of the fundamental duties of the public and intelligentsia was to separate truth from falsehood. He was a stringent proposer of rational criticism while at the same time being open minded. Sagan was not an extremist in any sense of the word, he was open to many “metaphysical” or “supernatural” ideas so long as they could be proven. In a writing titled “The Fine Art of Boloney Detection” Sagan begins with his interpretations, or rather his feelings concerning life after death. He states that he is not opposed to the idea of some continued existence after death, but all that needs to be done is the small matter of proving it. Sagan describes how one might disprove or prove the idea of contact with the dead, by asking questions as a manner of garnering evidence which would not be common knowledge to someone who exists today but instead was general to someone who lived 30000 years ago. Knowledge claims have the responsibility of withstanding pressure and examination in any form so as to assess their validity. Independent conformation of facts is always a must as this could be seen as the best and quickest way to disprove false knowledge claims. Sagan expresses the idea that science should contain no authorities on a subject but should instead have experts who have the benefit of fact and not just purely conjecture. The question of whether or not knowledge claims should be open to rational criticism is complementary to the philosophy of Carl Sagan in many of the above-mentioned ways. I believe that Sagan would argue for assumptions of knowledge to be considered truth they need to be rationally criticized.

While it was easy to rationally criticize the idea that all water conducts electricity, deeper arguments can also be reasoned against, some of which have far reaching implications. One such example would be the assumption that all of space was Euclidian in nature. Many, if not all at the time, believed that space was ordered based on sets of numbers which could be plotted on a Cartesian plane, made up of straight lines and modeled by our notion of a flat plane. Around the early 1900s, however, some began to criticize this idea. Einstein, for one, proposed in his General Theory of Relativity that space was generally flat but also elliptical where there seemed to be high concentrations of energy and therefore matter. Einstein showed, with his field equations, how the characteristics of space are non-linear surrounding a mass as a result of the properties of its gravitational field. In a sense the field equations illustrate how matter influences space-time and how matter is influenced by the curved space. The importance of rational criticism becomes evident as we begin to see that even something as grand as our interpretation of space itself can be flawed or incorrect. By showing both reason against, in the form of data and equations, as well as criticism for the accepted norm, Einstein was able to dislodge some of the longest standing fundamental assumptions, not only creating new interpretation but also building upon previous understanding of the nature of space.

As to whether knowledge claims should be open to rational criticism, the answer is an undoubtedly and resounding yes. Without the use of rational criticism there would be no refining of any ideas, no advancement in the way of understanding for any topic or concerning any thing. Truth is singular. It is ultimate in its nature, meaning that for truth to be true it needs to be tested, it needs to be value against other opinions of thought, so that it can be said to be right. Only when this happens can there ever be a chance for a truth to become more than an assumption of something based on that which is believed to be there.